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SUBJECT: DANISH MOD WANTS DENMARK TO REMAIN ENGAGED IN IRAQ

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In a May 6 meeting, Ambassador Crocker and MNF-I Commanding General Petraeus thanked Danish Defense Minister Soren Gade for Denmark's important contributions to the NATO Training Mission-Iraq and provided an overview of the current situation here, with an emphasis on events in Basrah and Sadr City. Gade noted that Afghanistan was looming larger in Danish planning but stressed that Denmark wanted to remain engaged in Iraq. Danish Ambassador to Iraq Bo Eric Weber, Brigadier General Christian Schmidt, Gade's Aide de Camp Bo Murer Jantzen, Danish Ministry of Defense Department Head Jans Henning Garly, Danish Defense Command's Steen Engelbrecht Pedersen and Tomas Anker Christensen from the Danish MFA accompanied Gade. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Defense Minister Gade stressed that, despite its small size and increased commitments in Afghanistan, Denmark wanted to "do something" to make a difference in Iraq. (Note: Denmark's per capita foreign aid contributions are among the highest in the world. End Note.) Ambassador Crocker explained that Prime Minister Maliki wanted Iraq aligned with the West -- a first in Iraqi history. The NATO Training Mission in Iraq was crucial in this respect because it cemented Iraq's relations not just with the United States, but with the West as a whole. Ambassador Crocker emphasized that contributions by countries like Denmark were important, among other reasons, to counter the impression that in Iraq it was "all U.S. all the time."

¶3. (C) Ambassador Crocker assessed that provincial elections would prove the most important political event of the year and would occur, if not in October, then before the end of the year. Ambassador Crocker continued that the elections were particularly important because they would right distortions created by a wide-spread Sunni boycott of the 2005 contests. Stressing that the obstacles remained considerable, Ambassador Crocker asked if the Danes planned to provide election support similar to USD 7.5 million provided in 2005. To the Danes' reply that they would consider it "if asked officially" the Ambassador quipped "consider yourself officially asked." The CG remarked that "incomparably more capable" Iraqi Security Forces would shoulder more of the security burden for elections than in ¶2005. One of the challenges, he cautioned, would be to ensure that the more pervasive ISF presence avoided any appearance of trying to influence election outcomes.

¶4. (C) The Ambassador related that as recently as six months ago "the knives were out" for the Prime Minister, but the Basra operation had greatly improved the political situation for Maliki. The CG continued that CF had played a strictly a supporting role in operations in the south where ISF had demonstrated impressive logistical and combat capability. Sadr City would be different; the goal was to grind down the militia over a longer period of time. To Gade's question about a peaceful settlement, the CG thought the Sadr City crackdown might lead to negotiations between the GOI and elements of the Sadr Trend, but would not include JAM Special

Groups, which the Prime Minister was determined to eliminate.

Gade asked if it was possible to disarm the militias. The CG explained that pervasive Iranian influence complicated matters, but that the GOI was formulating a strategy to confront Iran about its insidious role in Iraqi internal affairs.

15. (C) Stressing that the GOI had never faced a threat of a similar magnitude, the CG said the GOI probably would not attempt to clear Sadr City but would use its significant Special Forces capability in raids against Special Group leaders. Ambassador Crocker observed that post-Basrah, the Iraqi public was rallying to a PM who fully understood the first rule of Iraqi politics -- the strong man wins. The CG cautioned that Maliki nevertheless could not afford to appear callous and that the objective was obviously to eliminate the Special Group threat without destroying Sadr City or creating a humanitarian crisis. Ambassador Crocker added that the Surge and the burgeoning Awakening Movements had given Iraqis the confidence to stand up to groups like AQI and JAM and to transform what had been a vicious cycle of sectarian violence into a virtuous circle of improved security and opportunity.

CROCKER